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TAGS: I Z PGOV

SUBJECT: SHEIKH AL-SHALAN DISCUSSES RECENT DEVELOPMENT IN DIWANIYAH

CLASSIFIED BY: Team Leader Angus T. Simmons, DOS REASON: 1.4(b)
and (d).

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Diwaniyah Cable.

¶2. (SBU) Summary: PRT Leader (Simmons) and PRTOffs met with COR member Sheikh Hussain Al-Shalan at the REO in Al Hillah on January 8 to discuss recent security and political developments in Diwaniyah as well as Baghdad. Al Shalan believes elections could take place in the summer of 2008. End Summary.

¶3. (C) Rule of Law and Security Developments:

Sheikh Al Shalan expressed support for Governor Al Khudari's welcome of newly installed Chief Judge A'ad and the Governor's offer to convert the former provincial government compound into a new Diwaniyah court house. The sheikh said he had helped to get the Diwaniyah Chief of Police confirmed by the Minister of Interior at the request of MG Buk. Although the chief has a Badr Corps background and was Governor Al Khudari's (also a Badr Corps stalwart) choice for the position, Al Shalan said he knew the chief's family and believed he would do a good job. However, he expressed concern that provincial governors can dismiss police chiefs at whim and urged the U.S. to help persuade PM Maliki to advance pending legislation in the Council of Representatives (COR) that would balance control of police chiefs between the MOI and provincial governors.

¶4. (C) Concern about Badr Corps Influence in Diwaniyah

Al Shalan also expressed concern over potential growing Badr Corps influence in Diwaniyah. He said the police had received at least four T-72 tanks from unknown sources and expressed concern that the police could become as well-armed as the army. He added that Badr Corps members stood along either side of the road in a show of support for the governor during a recent visit to Hamza (a tribal area where Shalan's brother lives).

¶5. (SBU) Police Equipment and Weapons for South-Central?

Al Shalan complained that the MOI had done a poor job in supporting the police in South-Central with equipment and weapons. He expected improvement in this situation soon because the COR had just passed a USD 520 million appropriation for the MOI to purchase police equipment for South-Central.

¶6. (C) Election in 2008?

Al Shalan predicted that the COR would succeed in passing the local governance law and an updated election code in time for elections in the summer of 2008. He believed the presence of international election monitors would be important to ensure free and fair elections, adding that the 2005 elections in Diwaniyah had substantially more irregularities than Najaf or Karbala. Shalan claimed that he had photographic evidence of ballot box substitution that he had passed to the international community,

and was doubtful that any domestic NGOs in Diwaniyah were capable of ensuring transparent and fair elections. The sheikh called for the USG to provide training for NGOs and the media prior to elections.

SIMMONS